

Standard USHC-5: The student will demonstrate an understanding of major social, political, and economic developments that took place in the United States during the second half of the nineteenth century.

USHC-5.4 Analyze the rise of the labor movement, including the composition of the workforce of the country in terms of gender, race/ethnicity, and skills; working conditions for men, women, and children; and union protests and strikes and the government's reactions to these forms of unrest. (H, E)

Taxonomy Level: 4B Analyze/ Conceptual Knowledge

Previous/future knowledge:

In 5th grade, students were introduced to the role of immigrants in the work force (5-3.3) and the problems of the working class that resulted in the labor reforms of the progressive era (5-3.5).

In 7th grade, students were introduced to the changes in the organization of work and labor brought about by the Industrial Revolution and the development of socialism (7-3.4).

In Global Studies, the focus was on the impact of industrialization on different countries; however, there is no specific mention of organized labor or the development of socialism or labor unions in the Global Studies standards.

In Economics, students will consider the impact of labor unions on the American economy (Econ 5.2) and so need this historical background to understand the reason for unions.

It is essential for students to know

This will be the first time that students are introduced to labor unions and efforts to regulate the work environment. It is essential that students understand that the development of unions was the result of the workers' attempt to join together to protect themselves against the abuses of the market place. As a 'right to work' state, there is little sympathy in South Carolina for the role of unions, so it is essential that unionization receive a balanced treatment in the classroom. It is also important not to judge the unions of the late 19th century by 20th century allegations of corruption.

Because this indicator asks students to **analyze** the rise of the labor union movement, it is important that students recognize and weigh the relative importance of factors that contributed to the degree of success of organized labor. Such factors include: divisions among workers due to **race and ethnicity**, public perception, fluctuating economic conditions, large scale immigration, the power of Big Business and the role of government. Prejudices against ethnic groups created prejudices against labor organizations as well as promoting conflict within the labor organization itself. It is also essential that students understand the role of economic factors such as supply and demand and economic depression. Common cultural perceptions such as the Horatio Alger myth and Social Darwinism played a role in undermining sympathy for workers.

Working conditions and the changing **composition of the work force** established the need for unions. The change from an artisan's shop to a large scale factory and mass production changed the nature of work from one in which the craftsman could take pride in his product to a specialization of labor that made work repetitious, boring and impersonal for the unskilled worker. The large factory and the pursuit of profit caused management to lose touch with the workers and increasingly treat workers as replaceable cogs in the wheels of production. The law of supply and demand was applied to labor; the influx of immigrants and dispossessed farmers drove down the wages of unskilled workers. During the 1890s only 45% of unskilled workers earned more than \$500 a year, the equivalent of today's poverty line. Long

hours and unsafe working conditions were also the result of management's attempt to hold down the cost of production and increase profits for investors. Working conditions affected family life as all members of the family, men, women and children, went to work in factories and sweatshops. By 1900, eight million women, representing 17% of the labor force, worked outside of the home. The workforce also included 20% of boys and 10% of girls under the age of 15. Death, injury and unemployment were a constant threat to the well-being of the family.

Labor organizations developed to address these conditions but had limited success. The effectiveness of these organizations depended on the unity of the organization, the economic conditions of the time and the public's perception of the union. The National Labor Union founded in the 1860s advocated the 8-hour day and reform through the political process but did not allow African American members so they formed their own organization, the Colored National Labor Union. The Knights of Labor was dominant in the 1870s and was open to all workers regardless of gender, race or level of skill. Although the Knights advocated the return to a more cooperative society, the unity of the organization was severely undermined by workers' and society's prejudice against both recent immigrants and African American workers. Despite the fact that the union preferred arbitration and opposed the strike, wildcat walkouts by disgruntled employees were blamed on the union. Such walkouts often were the result of economic downturns during which workers were laid off or wages were cut. Striking when many other unskilled workers were desperately seeking employment undermined the effectiveness of the strike and the power of the union. Management used scabs as strike breakers (often African Americans and recent immigrants thus further dividing the working class), private security forces, economic pressure through company ownership of homes and company stores as well as 'yellow dog' contracts and blacklisting to control the workers. As a result of violence during strikes, union members were often associated in the media and therefore in the public mind with dangerous radicals such as socialists, communists and anarchists. Local and national government also took the side of management, protecting their property by putting down strikes and arresting strikers (USHC 5.2).

Unskilled workers were difficult to organize because of ethnic animosities. Native born workers often resented foreign born workers and advocated restrictions on immigration. Male workers, influenced by gender stereotypes, also resented women in the labor force because they were paid less and so were a threat to male jobs. The American Federation of Labor (AFL) rose to prominence in the 1890s and still exists today. This organization of workers through craft unions of skilled workers rather than industrial unions of all workers involved in an industry led to some success for the labor union movement. The AFL advocated the use of collective bargaining to reach agreements on the "bread and butter" issues of wages, hours and conditions. Skilled workers were more difficult to replace and so the threat of strike was more effective. Although wages rose and hours fell by the end of the century, it is essential for students to understand that the average hours worked were still far longer than the 8-hour day advocated by unions. Wages were still very low and wage gains were offset by the rise in the cost of living. Union effectiveness was undermined by the relatively small number of workers who belonged to unions, only about 4% of all workers by 1900.

Students should be familiar with the circumstances and results of the major labor incidents such as the Railroad **strike** of 1877, the Haymarket incident, and the Pullman strike. The success of the Railroad strike led to an increase in labor union membership. The association of the Haymarket incident with anarchism led to the demise of the Knights of Labor. The arrest and imprisonment of the leader of the Pullman strike led to the Supreme Court's application of the Sherman Anti-trust Act to unions. [This act, designed to control the power of Big Business, was used against the workers' unions at the same time that the court was finding that it could not be applied to Big Business (USHC 5.2). It was not until after he was jailed as a result of the Pullman strike that Eugene V. Debs became a socialist.]

It is essential for students to understand that the labor unions of the late nineteenth century were neither socialist nor communist organizations, although they may have had some socialist or communist members. This common misunderstanding is the result of anti-union rhetoric and the role of the IWW. The Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), known as the “Wobblies”, which was founded in 1905 and advocated the overthrow of capitalism. The unpopularity of the IWW during World War I led to the arrest and deportation of many of its members during the Red Scare of the early 1920s (USHC 7.3).

Other incidents led to public concern for the plight of the workers. The Children’s March led by Mother Jones and the Triangle Shirtwaist factory fire brought public attention to the evils of child labor and the unsafe working conditions in factories. It was not until the progressive President Theodore Roosevelt began to support the right of workers to bargain collectively that unions began to get some government recognition (USHC 5.7). It was not until the New Deal that the unions’ right to organize workers was recognized in the law (USHC 7.5).

By the end of the 19th century unions were not successful in changing the abuses of the workplace. This was due to public perception of them as dangerous and to government support of the interests of Big Business.

It is not essential for students to know:

Union activity preceded the Civil War and developed as economic depression caused management to speed up the pace of work or cut wages. The first strikes were organized by female workers in the textile factories of New England. The success of union activity was undermined when Irish workers took the place of the original Lowell girls in the 1840s and 1850s, an early indication of the role of immigration in undermining the effectiveness of unions.

References to the changing nature of the workplace from the convivial shop where the bottle was passed periodically to one that was run by the clock may be left out of the discussion. The separation of owners and workers intensified with the contract system whereby the hiring of unskilled workers was subcontracted. Unskilled workers earned 1/3 of the wages of skilled artisans. Workers often were laid off as a result of economic downturns and the resulting transience of unskilled workers as they moved about the country looking for work undermined efforts to organize them.

Although it is important for students to understand the dangerous conditions in the workplace, they do not need to know all of the details about job related injury such as black lung and brown lung. The government did not protect the worker in the workplace in the 19th and early 20th centuries because the courts considered employer negligence to be one of the normal risks that employees took to be able to work.

Workers formed fraternal organizations and ethnic clubs in order to provide each other sickness and accident benefits but wages were so low that these organizations were able to collect little and widows and orphans relied upon relatives and neighbors for help. These organizations increased ethnic identity and undermined the unions.

They do not need to know the names of the leaders of the various unions such as William H. Sylvis (NLU), Uriah Stephens, Terrence Powderley (Knights of Labor) and Samuel Gompers (AFL). They do not need to know that Irish Catholics feared joining the Knights because of the Masonic type rites that the Knights practiced. However, Bishop Gibbons gave his blessing to the Knights, thus promoting the unionization of Irish Catholic workers which gave a temporary boost to the organization. They do not need to know the role of the Knights in promoting the Chinese Exclusion Act and the Foran Contract Labor Act.

Although it is important to know that women supported the labor union movement, it is not necessary for students to know the specific names of their organizations such as the International Ladies Garment Workers' Union or the Telephone Operators Department of the International Brotherhood of Electrical Workers. Students do not need to know about the Sugar Beet and Farm Laborers Union of Oxnard or the union of Chinese and Japanese mine workers in California.

Assessment guidelines:

Appropriate assessments will require students to **analyze** the problems of labor in the late 19th century and the extent to which labor organizations were able to enlist the support of the public and government in correcting those problems. They should be able to **identify** the elements that contributed to the rise of the labor movement. Students should be able to **attribute** or identify the point of view of both critics and supporters of the labor movement in text. Students should be able to **interpret** maps, graphs, and political cartoons and **infer** their relationship to information about the time period. Students should be able to **interpret** the government's reaction to the labor union movement and **infer** its significance for American democracy.